

## **ISRI Statement to Basel Convention Conference of the Parties (COP)**

*In response to the Norwegian Government's proposals to amend Annexes II, VIII and IX and create a Partnership for Plastics Wastes*

May 4, 2019 | Geneva

Thank you, Mr. President and delegates for this opportunity. I am speaking on behalf of the U.S.-based Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries – or ISRI. We represent the recycling industry, and we are part of the solution.

Believe it or not, recyclers agree with and are sensitive to all the issues discussed. But are we missing the opportunity to demand more to fight illegal trade. There are criminal syndicates tied to illegal recycling operations, sometimes owned by foreigners found not even to respect their own countries' environment and as correctly identified as so by BAN. ISRI is a staunch advocate for responsible recycling, regulatory enforcement and improving the quality of materials in compliance with our internationally-recognized Specifications.

Nearly every party lamented the poor management of waste in their countries. This venue could have been a showcase for the billions of private sector dollars pledged to help build you, such as for the type of capacity building needed for education and separation infrastructure noted by many delegations. I'm told that funding is now at risk without assurance of legitimate and nonhazardous trade of mixed as well as unmixed plastics, which will be the first casualty under the Prior Informed Consent procedure. Good traders will follow the rules while the bad guys won't.

Certain governments pressure us to recycle more, but what happens next? The materials need a consumer market. Let's promote sustainable goods to create more market demand for recycled materials and therefore increase the value of those materials. Higher value means millions of stable, secure paying jobs in all your countries to help you keep these materials out of your waterways.

We thank Norway for taking the initiative, but we are worried that the proposal and the suggested changes will prevent countries that lack materials management infrastructure – such as for collection, sorting and recycling – from sending what they can collect – including single-use beverage PET bottles with the poly-propylene caps still on – to countries that do have recycling and disposal capacity. In 2018, the United States imported more than 92 million<sup>1</sup> kilos of plastic waste and scrap from non-OECD countries, and the European Union imported more than 76 million kilos of plastic waste and scrap from non-OECD countries. That means more than 168 million kilos of plastics that did not pollute the environment. It may be just a small percentage of what is estimated to enter the oceans, but the Prior Informed Consent procedure – an administrative burden both to businesses and over-worked governments – means that

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<sup>1</sup> Including nearly 11 million kilos of plastics from Honduras; more than 10 million kilos from Nigeria; more than 7 million kilos from Indonesia and almost 6 million kilos from Ecuador.

these plastics will have nowhere to turn but to stay in countries of origin and face mismanagement and eventual flow into waterways.

The Draft Decision on Marine Plastic Litter and Micro-Plastics – with the edits proposed last night by the European Union – do address these issues, but more is needed, and we can help including through participation in a Partnership for Plastic Waste. We ask delegates to support the creation of an Expert Working Group to fine tune the Norwegian proposal, including with Argentina's proposals but to also improve definitions for contamination and other wastes to be excluded, rather than vote for its current form, which will only make an already bad situation much, much worse.

Thank you.